

## Foster Care

Foster care is a temporary living arrangement for children in state custody who are unable to remain in their homes of origin for a variety of reasons, including abuse, neglect, status offense charges, or delinquent charges. Foster care strives to support the efforts of the families caring for children in the state's custody while working to achieve permanency for each child in care. Foster parents are trained paraprofessionals who partner with DCS and private contractors to care for children.

The DCS Foster Care Program serves children in the custody of the state of Tennessee in out-of-home placements other than Youth Development Centers and juvenile detention centers. The program is a multi-faceted support network that includes foster care, kinship foster care, and independent living programs as well as auxiliary programs designed to support the efforts of foster care in Tennessee. On June 30, 2002 approximately 10,103 children were in state custody



in Tennessee. Nearly 54% (5,474) of these children were in community-based, family foster care placements.

In FY 2002 efforts focused on increasing the number of trained and available foster family homes in Tennessee. In the area of foster parent training, the department expanded the availability of pre-service training to foster parents with the addition of a video version of PATH training and the development of PATH support group training to kinship caregivers. These two additional delivery strategies have been combined with the traditional group delivery and individualized presentation to better meet the training needs of potential foster parents. Structure and staffing were put in place so that 144 PATH pre-service groups for potential foster care parents can be offered annually. The department also began targeted efforts to recruit foster parents, and realized a 6% increase in the number of available foster homes.

Following the *Brian A.* mandates for the placement of children, the department has seen a steady decline in the number of foster homes serving three or more children. Prior to *Brian A.*, foster homes could have up to six children in the home. Currently, when there are three or more children in the same home it relates directly to the placement of siblings in the same homes. A decrease has also been seen in the number of children placed long distances from their home counties. Long distance placements from a child's home typically result from the child being placed with a relative or in a setting designed to address a special need.



The department continues to support the efforts of the Tennessee Foster Care Association. The largest annual training conference was held in November 2001 at Paris Landing State Park. Over 500 foster and adoptive parents and staff were in attendance. The department also supported ongoing foster parent in-service training through a contract with the University of Tennessee in consultation with the Tennessee Foster Care Association. Through local and regional training efforts foster parents were provided training and support.

FY 2002 marked the introduction of the Family to Family model to the department's service array. This model of service provision is based on the idea that working with families within their communities is crucial. Through collaboration with and a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the department has obtained \$1.2 million to launch efforts to assist communities in taking an active role in the lives of their children. Through community-